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ABSTRACT

Since 1988, thousands of rural villagers across Senegal have participated in a basic education program called TOSTAN, which means "breakthrough" in Wolof, the majority language. Supported by UNICEF and implemented in the six national languages of Senegal, TOSTAN goes beyond traditional literacy programs to link literacy learning with life skills and participatory learning methods. The 18-month program comprises 6 learning modules, each covering 24 sessions and lasting 2 months. Influenced by the whole-language approach, the program exposes learners to real texts and encourages them to write. Learning to read, write, and do mathematics is tied to the improvement of local living conditions and is adapted to the needs of rural women. The first module presents a five-step problem-solving process, which is used throughout the other modules to address specific issues. The other modules cover hygiene and disease prevention, prevention of dehydration from diarrhea and child immunizations, basic financial and material management skills, leadership and group dynamics, and feasibility of income-generating projects. Program facilitators come from the local area and have completed intensive training. They are advised by trainers who cover 10-13 villages and who work closely with development agents and local authorities. Recently the program was adapted and expanded to serve adolescents. Evaluations, funding issues, and the wider benefits of the program for Senegalese society are discussed. (Contains photographs.) (SV)

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Breaking Through
BY CYNTHIA GUTTMAN
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Education for All: Making it Work

About the project

The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, recognized that a policy of "more of the same" would not be sufficient to achieve the goal of education for all. Educational systems in most countries clearly need an injection of fresh ideas, a broader vision of how the basic learning needs of all might be met, and the courage to turn this vision into practice.

It was this quest for an expanded and renovated vision of basic education which prompted UNESCO and UNICEF to launch their joint project 'EDUCATION FOR ALL: MAKING IT WORK' right after Jomtien. The two Organizations decided to disseminate and promote examples of educational change – both in the realm of formal and non- formal education– through which the principles of Jomtien would come to life: programmes which provide learning opportunities for children, youth, and adults, including underserved groups and those with special needs; programmes which focus on actual learning acquisition, rather than on mere participation or certification requirements; programmes which aim to provide a solid foundation for life- long learning, which are responsive to the learning needs and conditions of the socio- cultural environment, and which build effective partnerships with local communities and parents.

UNESCO and UNICEF believe that effective and sustainable change in education arises from the inventiveness, experience and dedication of educators, parents, and community leaders at the grassroots. The 'EDUCATION FOR ALL: MAKING IT WORK' project shows that educational innovation and change are already underway in all developing countries and that even the poorest countries are able to take up the challenge of devising educational programmes to fit their means, needs, and aspirations.

The project strategy emphasizes educational innovation in practice rather than discourse. The INNOV database presents many little known experiences, some of them with considerable potential. The most promising and significant ones are showcased in the present series of booklets, or through films contained in the EDUCATION FOR ALL VIDEOBANK. Others are grouped together and compared in a new series of THEMATIC PORTFOLIOS, devoted to critical issues in basic education.

All these resource materials are used in training workshops, inter- project visits and similar activities meant to support specialists and planners from developing countries in their struggle to turn education for all into a reality.

The project team will be pleased to receive new information, comments and suggestions from all those interested in promoting change and innovation in basic education. We particularly appeal to UNICEF and UNESCO colleagues in the field to cooperate actively with the project.

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"To serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitment to basic education as it now exists. What is needed is an 'expanded vision' that surpasses [...] conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices."

WORLD DECLARATION ON EDUCATION FOR ALL,
Article 2

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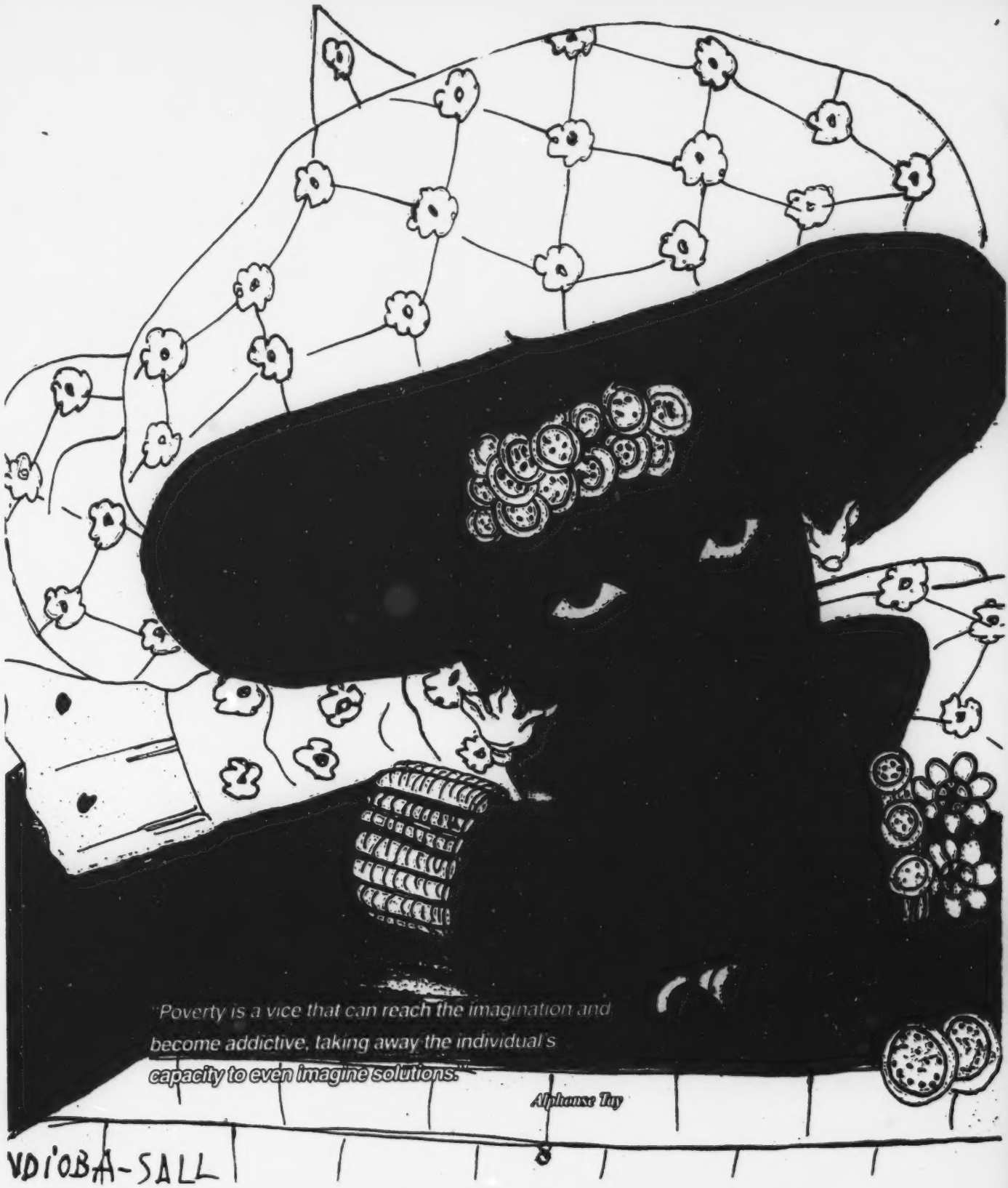
"Poverty is a vice that can reach the imagination and become addictive, taking away the individual's capacity to even imagine solutions."
Alphonse Tay
VDI'OBA-SALL

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Introduction

"Three years ago, I woke up each morning, fetched water from the village well, pounded millet for the day, washed bowls and pots, took care of the children, cooked meals and kept silent about my problems and dreams! I was like my mother and thought my girls would be the same as me. Today, things have changed. Working alongside other women, I have helped find solutions for many of our village problems, I am responsible for managing a project, and I am no longer afraid to speak out about my fears and hopes. Who could have imagined that I, Duusu Konate, could make such a difference in my community!"

These words from a Senegalese woman living in the village of Kër Simbara reflect the thoughts of many of the thousands of women who have participated in a basic education programme in national languages known as TOSTAN, or non-formal education for development.

In Wolof, spoken by 71 per cent of all Senegalese, TOSTAN means "breakthrough". It is a fitting name for a comprehensive, 18-month programme which goes beyond literacy to give adult learners the means to define and solve their problems, improve their family's health and more generally, fight the age-old idea that all misfortunes are due to "fate". The programme, developed with villagers over more than ten years, is tailored to local conditions and takes African culture as the starting point for analysing the present and making progress in the future.

With the success of the adult programme, TOSTAN developed a modular approach and methodologies to reach the thousands of

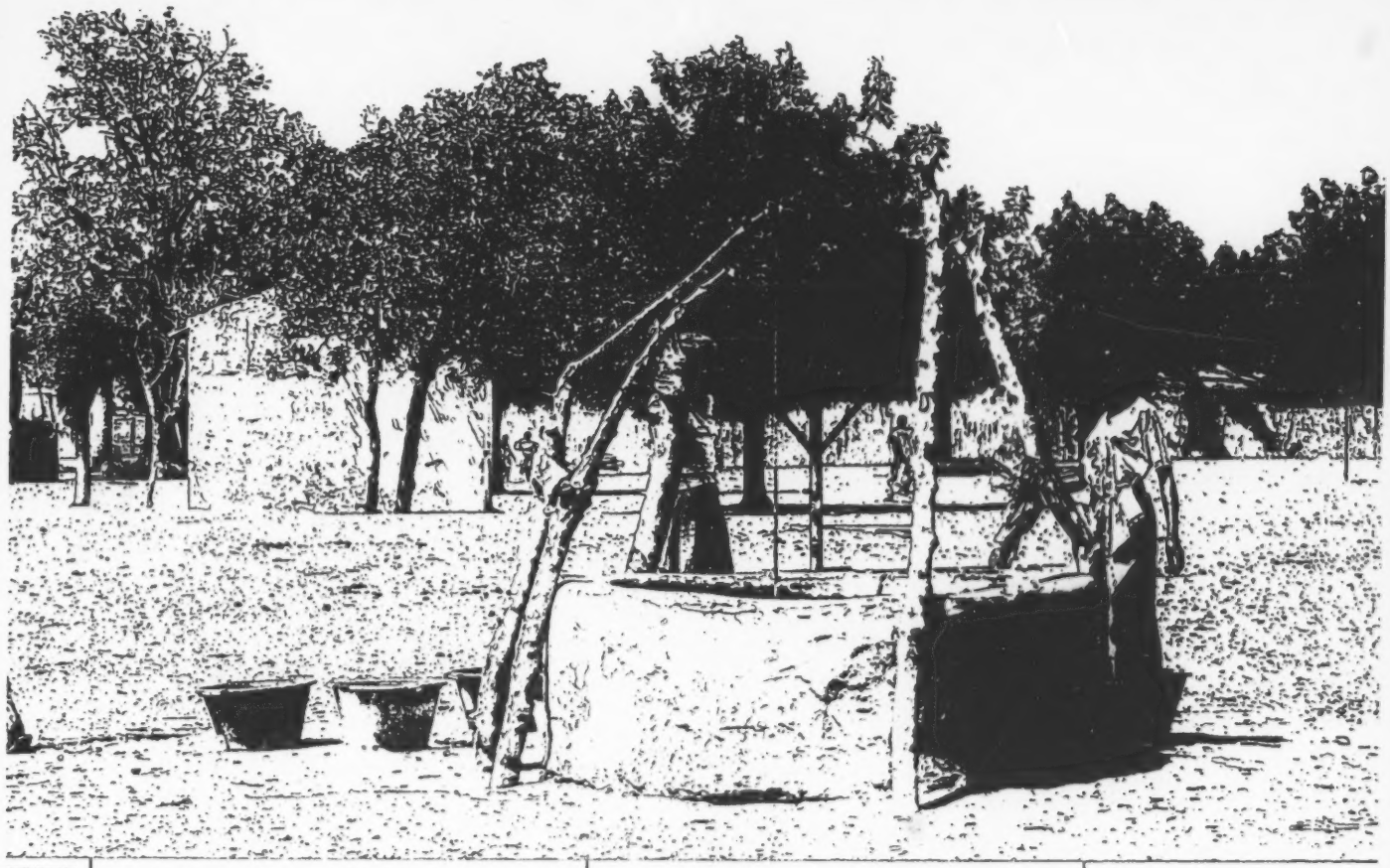


Photo: TOSTAN

Senegalese children who have never been to school and would have no chance to do so under the formal system. The programme, begun in villages where the adults have already been through the six modules, is presently in the experimental phase and other NGOs are also participating in the conception and implementation.

The culturally-sensitive programme is the idea of African and American scholars, as well as Molly Melching (given the name Sukkéyna Njaay), who came to Senegal in 1974 to complete a master's degree in African literature. She never left; instead she studied oral traditions, learned Wolof and worked with underprivileged children in Dakar before moving to a village, Saam Njaay, to explore further the relationship between culture and education.

Through extensive experiment and support from the Senegalese government, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), this team of non-formal educational specialists developed a six-module programme in national languages, with detailed guides to help lead trainers and facilitators through the course. Since 1988, the programme has reached 15,000 adults in over 350 villages across Senegal. A 1992 evaluation said adult learners who had completed the basic education programme were more likely to vaccinate their children and use the oral rehydration solution, shared their knowledge with neighbouring villages, and favoured the course's problem-solving process as a way to improve their standard of living. Several non-governmental organizations have adopted the programme, which is in growing demand across Africa. Its success in linking writing, reading and math with life skills to deal with vital issues is one of its strongest selling points.

Thousands of Senegalese women have participated in the TOSTAN programme, started by Molly Melching (bottom photo, first from left).

The adult programme:
tackling illiteracy in Senegal

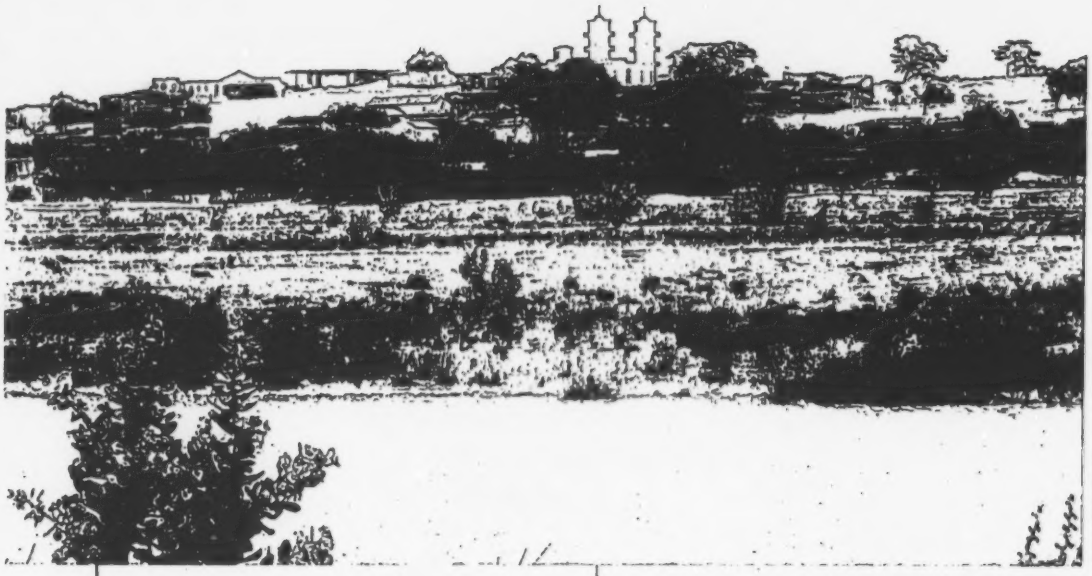
A former French colony of 7.9 million people, Senegal lies on the west coast of Africa, a region with low access to and achievement in education. With only half of all children and just over one third of girls at school age completing the primary education cycle, Senegal is similar to its Sahelian neighbours. In 1988, the literacy rate of women over 15 years was 25 per cent, for men it was 52 per cent. In this mainly rural country, there are entire villages in which not a single person has the rudiments of literacy.

Only half of all children complete the primary education cycle.

Primary education usually begins at age 7, lasts for six years and, officially, is compulsory. In 1981, the *"école nouvelle"* aimed to lift schools out of their colonial ways by giving them a more truly African character, better adapted to development needs. Reformers called for more scientific and technical training to reduce the country's dependence on revenue from its few export commodities (notably groundnuts and phosphates). In 1991, on the recommendation of an education commission, the country began a major decentralization programme as part of the effort to achieve 100 per cent school attendance for primary-age children by the year 2000. The commission called for more non-formal education and the gradual introduction of productive work and national languages into school programmes.

Since the early 1970s, the use of national languages in education has been increasingly stressed. Although French is the official language, only about a quarter of the population speak it, whereas Wolof is spoken by over 70 per cent. Wolof is also the language in which Melching first started to work, by writing children's stories with African rather than French themes. In 1971, the Senegalese government recognized that the country had six languages: Wolof, Pulaar, Serer, Mandingo, Diola and Saraokolé. Some ethnic groups, especially the Pulaar, have energetically defended their language, while at university level, linguists have devoted extensive efforts to transcribe oral languages into written form. Three daily newspapers run a bi-weekly feature in three national languages, an initiative supported by UNICEF. *SOFAA*, a monthly newspaper published in Wolof and Pulaar, also provides in-depth articles on international and national events.

The government has recognized that literacy programmes work best when conducted in national languages, but the fight against illiteracy has been plagued by a severe lack of resources and poor coordination. No basic education programme in national languages existed in Senegal in 1987. At central government level, responsibility for literacy has often been tossed around



The will to reduce adult illiteracy is one thing. Finding a programme that keeps people motivated and prevents a relapse is another.

between ministries. The absence of a well thought out national strategy, poor training of literacy practitioners and too few educational materials have meant ad hoc interventions with little supervision or follow-up. Poor planning is also due to lack of precise literacy figures. "We have to do the ground work where we want to intervene, to know the average literacy rate in a given village," says Amadou Alpha Bah, a TOSTAN education specialist. "We could save time if this were done by local authorities."

But things are changing. A ministry for literacy and the promotion of national languages was created in 1991. One of the thrusts of the ministry's policy is to decentralize operations and develop partnerships with non-governmental and community organizations. To this end, a national committee was set up to enhance concertation, promote action-research, further the exchange of experiences to build capacity, and improve data collection. "There is currently a craze for literacy programmes in national languages," says Jacques Laberge of the Canadian embassy in Dakar. "In the past eighteen months, the ministry has taken things in hand, come up with an action plan and sought better coordination." In every region and department for example, a literacy adviser has been appointed to work with education inspectors.

The will to reduce illiteracy is one thing. Finding a programme that keeps adults motivated and prevents a relapse is another. Before starting the education programme, TOSTAN trainers recall visiting literacy classes in rural areas: "We would go to a class and there would be four or five people instead of the fifty registered. In one of the classes, a man was at the blackboard reading a long paragraph on how to write the letter 'G' and the other people were sitting there, a little sleepy. We went to another class and asked a woman who had been attending that class for five months whether she could read or write. She said, "Well, you know, we spent a couple of months studying the difference between the short 'a' and the long 'a'. Meanwhile, one in every four children under 5 was dying in rural Senegal". Deborah Fredo, an education specialist from the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst who participated in developing TOSTAN's materials, explains that "before TOSTAN, there were only literacy materials with phonetic-syllabic readers, and few actual reading materials. The ministry produced newsletters in national languages but you could rarely find them in villages. Literacy teachers trained people with one book and then it was over."

The seeds: building on tradition

"He who rejects his traditions may find himself being deceived by other traditions."
Wolof proverb

MOSTAN's roots go back to Melching's early years in Senegal, when she studied under the late Cheikh Anta Diop, a fervent believer in the development of national languages and the importance of indigenous African cultures. Since then, Melching and her collaborators have travelled the country with the spirit of ethnologists, collecting songs, proverbs, legends and stories that are a rich source of literacy materials.

Children were their first testing ground. In 1976, in collaboration with the Senegalese Ministry of Culture, she and Bollé Mbaye, a dramatic arts graduate well-versed in African traditions, opened *"Demb ak Tey"* (Yesterday and Today), a centre to promote non-formal education in Wolof for Senegalese children by giving them access to books, theatre, puppetry, games and art activities based on their traditions. Located in the Medina, a crowded section of downtown Dakar, the centre became a favourite meeting spot for neighbourhood children who otherwise spent most of their time on the streets. At first, the children were given various new reading materials in Wolof. "We noticed that books at school were in French, which meant children not at school could only look at the pictures in them. We saw the children were very excited about reading," Bollé explained. "So we devised a game. We cut out a lot of letters and drew pictures of day-to-day objects the children knew. They would use the letters to create the corresponding words which had been used in the books we had been reading with them. We found that after only a few weeks many children were reading small texts." With puppets modeled on traditional Senegalese dolls, children staged their own puppet shows performed in the neighbourhoods and later on Senegalese television.

"We found that after only a few weeks many children were reading small texts."

The *Demb ak Tey* Centre expanded its activities by reaching out to thousands of other Senegalese children in a two-hour weekly radio programme in Wolof from 1978 to 1982. Named "*The Circle of Yesterday and Today*", a reference to the way children once gathered round their grandmothers in a circle to hear songs, riddles, proverbs and stories, the programme focused on the activities and interests of children in rural Senegal. Like a caravan in ancient times, the programme's producers went from village to village collecting materials. "Suddenly, parents began working with children so that when the radio programme passed through, they would have good and interesting materials. It became a kind of competition between villages to see who would have the richest materials," Bollé and Melching recall. The programme became very popular: the village children and even the adults could just about recite every play and story broadcast from the previous week. This prompted the producers to put more messages into the show about health, the environment and the importance of education. "We started doing plays on health and the environment, and songs on the importance of reading and writing." Children and adults listened regularly to the programme and used it as a forum for discussion in their villages.

The Saam Njaay adventure

ncouraged by this, the *Demb ak Tey* Centre moved to Saam Njaay in 1982, a drought-stricken Sahelian village of 300 people located an hour from Dakar. Melching and Bollé's arrival in the village was auspicious: as the story goes, El Hadji Moustapha Njaay, the village chief who was 95 years old, had known 40 years earlier that an unusual woman could come to Saam Njaay because his father had dreamt of her arrival and the changes she would bring about in the village. What started as a three-month theatre project financed by the non-governmental organization ENDA-Tiers Monde turned into a two-year stay, during which a basic education programme was developed with villagers. The experiment was financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in conjunction with a project at the Senegalese National School of Applied Economics (ENEA).

"When Molly came", the village chief told a visitor, "the village women walked five miles a day to get water. Now they get water here. Before, we had no system for gardening and our people often went hungry in the dry season. Many of the village's babies died before the age of 2. Now we have enough food for the dry season and a health hut that serves this and 18 other villages. The young men also used to get bored and restless and left the village to go into Dakar. Today they are here with us, deeply involved in village projects." Proof of that is the grinding mill, run by the women and now making a good profit. The dispensary is self-financing and the nursery garden, known for its production of eggplants, has prospered.

Saam Njaay is a symbol of the future TOSTAN basic education programme. First, because every innovation came after dialogue with villagers. "We spent a lot of time talking about what people did already, what their problems and needs were," says Melching of her team's early days in Saam Njaay. "We talked about traditional farming and the kinds of events that were really important to them. Their first priority was to have access to water. Their second priority was to read and write. They wanted to learn how to write their names and correspond with their friends and relatives. They were very open and excited by our approach and our interest in them. We recorded everything and told them we would write it down, come back and say 'look: this is what you have said!'".

At first, villagers saw French as the language of progress. Since colonial days, mastery of reading and writing in French had been synonymous with paid employment or, more important, a job in the civil service in Dakar. The team pointed to the large number of unemployed, educated people in cities and considered the advantages of learning Wolof. "The villagers became increasingly excited to discover that in only a matter of months, they would be able to write letters, understand receipts and forms (for selling their millet and peanuts) and manage their own village projects," said Bollé. They unanimously chose to begin classes in Wolof.

Every innovation came after dialogue with villagers. "We spent a lot of time talking about what people did already, what their problems and needs were".

A meaningful road to literacy

Looking at familiar objects that resembled letters, the roofs of two huts became an "m", the round mats woven by women were perfect "o"s.

Although the Tostan programme takes eighteen months, villagers learn basic reading and writing skills in four or five months. In Saam Njaay, most participants (men, women and children between 10 and 60), had never seen a text in Wolof. The first step was to motivate participants by writing down their names, their proverbs and stories, or their daily activities, then reading these texts back to them. The villagers copied the texts in shaky but determined handwriting. The team only introduced the study of individual letters at a later time and then through use of an alphabet song using traditional rhythms which soon captivated the whole village. They toured the village with learners and identified familiar objects that resembled letters. The roofs of two huts became an "m". The round mats woven by women were perfect "o"s. The first lessons were in the backyard of a village compound. "We helped everyone practise writing circles and lines until they were used to holding a pencil. Then each participant chose a favourite word to learn. We gave each person his or her word and asked them to copy it several times," says Melching. "The artist on our team, Malick Pouye, drew pictures of the objects represented by the words. With these words we put together a basic village vocabulary to which we adapted traditional Wolof games to reinforce word recognition and spelling." Unlike most literacy projects in West Africa which stress letter repetition and syllable combination, this approach, influenced by the "whole language approach", emphasizes meaning, exposes participants to real texts from day one and encourages them to create texts. Because they are familiar with the text's content, reading comes more easily.

Within five months, many villagers had start-

ed to write. Some began taking notes at meetings and recording the births and deaths in registers. As they acquired literacy skills, they also gained confidence in their ability to change their living conditions.

At one literacy meeting on the environment, women talked about the long distances they had to walk to find firewood, although they knew of the dangers of deforestation. After visiting the nearby Forestry Department, a group of villagers wrote a play on this theme, featuring a child who meets the king of all trees in Senegal while looking for wood. He transports her to a magical country where every tree talks to her through a poem or song, explaining the importance of protecting and planting trees. Besides a performance in Wolof for the national 'Day of Trees' ceremony, the play was broadcast several times on national radio. An exhibition by the villagers was the basis for an educational brochure published by the National Forestry Department. As a result of this mobilization, the villagers planted a small wood lot and built more than fifty clay and sand stoves in five nearby villages. Health issues, including malaria prevention and treatment, were also introduced into the literacy programme. Villagers elected a health committee and the head of each household gave FCFA 1,000 (US$2) to buy medicines. The committee later secured funds to build a health hut.

The positive experiences in Saam Njaay, combined with visits to numerous literacy centres around the country, convinced the project's team to make its teaching methods available more systematically to larger numbers. A first attempt to organize materials into a modular system for an educational programme took place in 1987 in forty-two villages of the Kaolack region. In 1988, UNICEF/Senegal and the Minister of Social Development reviewed the Saam Njaay experience and the first draft of the basic education programme in Kaolack. Both parties were convinced that the hundreds of broken down millet machines, pumps, windmills and health huts in rural Senegal would still be working if villagers had been more involved and educated before project implementation. Between 1989 and 1992, upon request from the Senegalese government and with funding from UNICEF and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), TOSTAN further developed and tested its basic adult education programme.

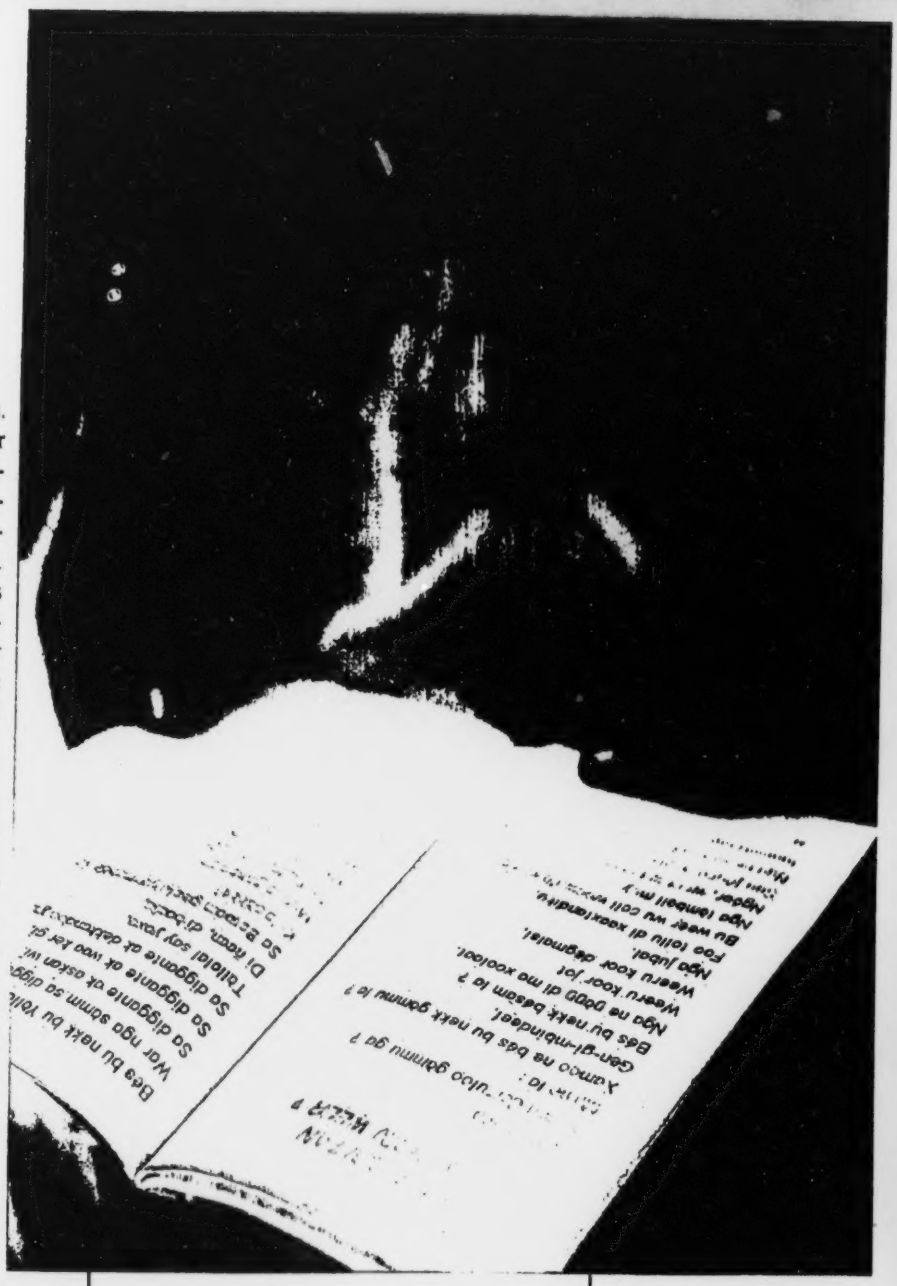
The TOSTAN programme has incited women to form cooperatives and take an active role in managing village funds.

Learning by modules: a progressive approach

"You never teach children anything; they learn because they want to learn."

TOSTAN has never abandoned the philosophy of education developed in Dakar when working with underprivileged children: "You never teach children anything; they learn because they want to learn. What you have to do is to stimulate them." In Saam Njaay, villagers were motivated when they found meaning through learning and understood why they were doing things. "We treat villagers as very intelligent adult learners", a TOSTAN co-ordinator, Sidy Cissé, explains. "All our educational materials are based on the idea that people have a vast store of knowledge which they have learned through different methods. They need to think about what they are doing and understand why they are doing it. They need to know why a new technique is being introduced, they need to analyse it and understand it, then decide with others if it's right for their community." The experience in Dakar and Saam Njaay also proved that games, songs and theatre rooted in local traditions encouraged participation.

In the TOSTAN programme, learning how to read, write and do mathematics goes hand in hand with improving living standards. Since women are both the main care givers in the Senegalese family and the least educated group in society, the programme has been adapted to them. This involved rewriting and retesting the programme to take into account the fact that most village women have never been to school and are



rarely exposed to letters and numbers. The "whole language approach," for example, is well-suited to this kind of situation since it starts with stories of relevant experiences rather than abstract letters that at first have no meaning. "Studies on the ways women learn stress values such as nurturing and interdependence. We emphasize people's need for one another, we try to show how people can work together, often citing traditional proverbs," said Ramata Dia of TOSTAN. "Women learn very quickly this way."

Journeying from the concrete to the abstract is used for teaching mathematics. Adapted from a method introduced at the Mauritanian Institute of National Languages, the approach emphasizes the notion of "base" as the foundation of all written and oral numeration. One of TOSTAN's education specialists, Amadou Alpha Bah, perfected the method, adapting it to the Senegalese environment and especially to women. Each maths lesson is tied to a practical skill and moves from the concrete (real objects) and the semi-abstract (drawings of objects) to the abstract (numbers).

The eighteen-month TOSTAN Basic Education Programme, presented to participants as a path of discovery, comprises six learning modules, each covering twenty-four sessions and lasting two months. Each session lasts about two hours. Based on their work schedules, learners choose the days and times of classes. Classes usually meet three times a week, every other day, but during the rainy season, learners generaliy meet once or twice a week. Many classes create study groups to review new information outside class hours. In one evaluation, a majority of village women maintained that coming to class regurlarly, namely every other day, was essential to sustained learning because it gave them the time needed to assimilate new knowledge.

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The backbone: solving problems

Not to tell participants what they should be thinking, but to introduce skills that will help them find their solutions.

When, on two occasions, a young child in the village of Kër Simbara crawled too close to his mother's cooking fire and was burned by a hot coal, women met to discuss how to prevent this kind of accident and find alternatives to dwindling supplies of firewood. After considering different solutions in the light of their resources, the women decided to build a clay stove in each household.

In Ker Sayib, the participants borrowed a room for their literacy classes. After two months, the landlord needed the room back. The women called a village meeting and discussed the problem as well as possible solutions based on their financial, material and human resources. They planned the solution together and built a centre with the help of other villagers.

These stories are classic examples of problem-solving in action, the theme of the programme's first module. As the teacher's guide to it explains, "To reach our goal of helping villagers become autonomous and independent, we start our programme by learning problem-solving techniques. The simplicity of the process followed in this module makes it easy to apply in the situations participants face in their daily lives. As in all sessions of the programme, our aim is not to tell participants what they should be thinking, but to introduce skills that will help them find their own adapted and creative solutions. Pictures, teaching games and stories help to make sessions lively and stimulating."

The problem-solving process has five steps:

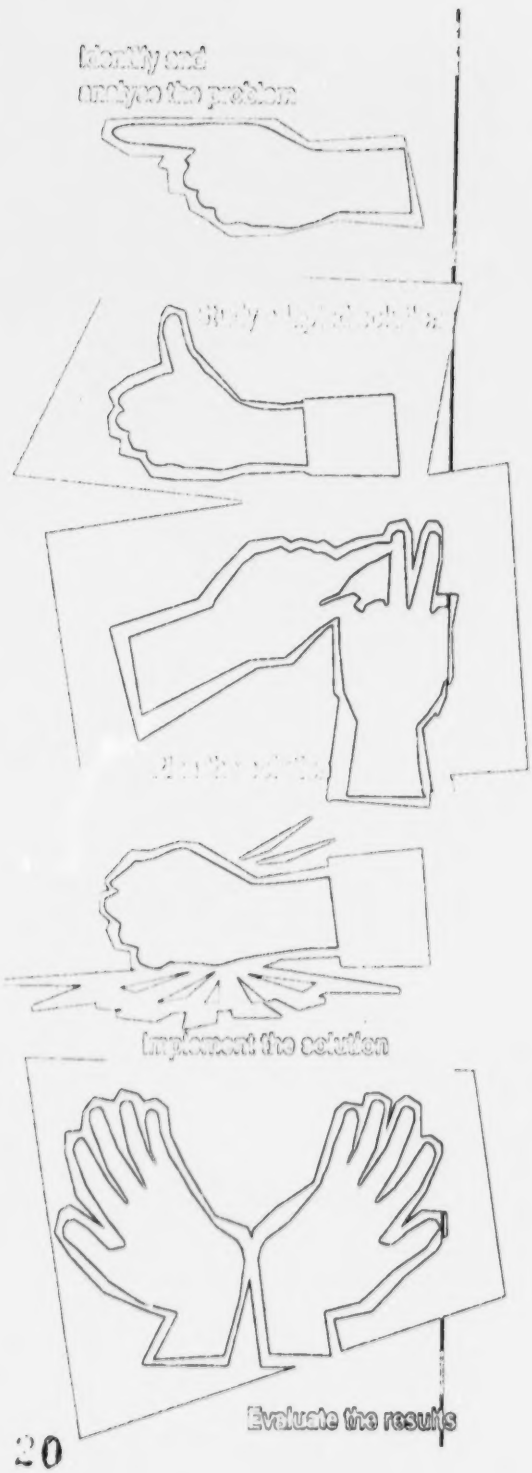
1) identifying and analysing the problem;
2) studying adapted solutions, based on available financial, material and human resources, as well as the time factor;
3) planning the solution: What needs to be accomplished? When do the steps have to be com-

pleted? Who is responsible? What human, material and financial resources are necessary? What are the possible obstacles?;
4) implementing the solution;
5) evaluating the results: did we solve the problem?

Each stage is symbolized by a distinct hand gesture (see attached graph) and analysed with stories and case studies. Through drawings showing a village where illness is rife, the mill grinder is broken down and women have no wood to cook, learners have to identify problems and draw up a rural development proposal by going through the steps above.

Literacy learning is made part of this process. By hearing and seeing words and sentences rather than isolated letters, learners understand that the goal of reading and writing is to understand and communicate. A sentence with a meaning is easier to grasp than a letter in isolation. In the first session, participants learn to match words with drawings. Every word studied is written on a card and stored in a "word box" for regular revision. Participants also immediately learn to recognize and write their own names and the name of their village and country, an extremely motivating exercise. As the problem-solving process is explained, key words are written on the board and read by several participants. "In this way, participants feel it is important to read and write so as to strengthen their knowledge of the problems," said Amadou Alpha Bah. "One reinforces the other." Learners get a pre-literacy book to practice reading and writing. By the end of this first module, they are able to write the numbers 0-9, read and write their names, their village name, and with help from their facilitator, short texts such as letters.

During this stage, the teacher is encouraged to create a literate environment: in most villages using the TOSTAN programme, there are signs identifying houses, trees, the health hut or the well. Participants are asked to study the words and try to copy them in their books.



Development in action:
from health to management

Photo: TOSTAN

A participant in Joal learns how to present the flip-chart on oral rehydration therapy. Yabata Njaay, a TOSTAN graduate, opened a village shop in Saam Njaay.

The problem-solving skills introduced in module 1 are used throughout the programme's five following modules, which deal with more specific issues.

Hygiene activities.
In module 2, participants learn technical information about the transmission of germs and the benefits of good personal and village hygiene. Putting the problem-solving process into action, small groups from the class form research teams to identify and analyse the major health and hygiene problems in their environment. At the same time, they learn to read and write text and words related to this experience and begin the study of syllables and letters. In a 1992 evaluation, 83 per cent of the participants asked felt that the activities had been sustained and reported that clean ups had been organized in most villages once a week.

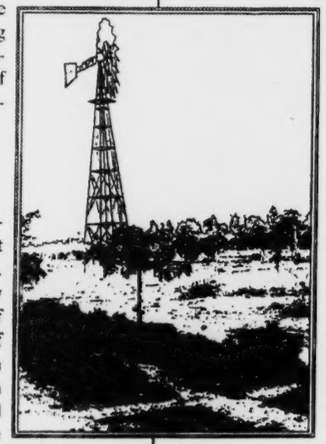
For this module, participants get a reading book which they use through module 4 and an illustrated health booklet on transmission of germs. In math, they learn addition, subtraction and numbers from 10 to 100. They also learn how to use the calendar and tell the time.

Use of the oral rehydration therapy and vaccinations.
Module 3 introduces health information on two major causes of death in children under 5: dehydration and illnesses resulting from lack of immunization. This stage also involves questioning traditional practices, such as using sometimes harmful cures prescribed by the local healer or the widespread belief that vaccinations can lead to paralysis in children or cause miscarriages.

TOSTAN developed a colourful flip chart to present the oral rehydration solution (ORS) which prevents dehydration from diarrhoea. Yabata Njaay, a village health agent from Saam Njaay who helped on the conception of this material explains: "Often people in Dakar don't understand that villagers don't want to be told what to do; they want to understand why they should be doing something. We wanted to know what diarrhoea is and why we should continue to use ORS even if it doesn't immediately stop the diarrhoea. The day I learned about this, I threw away the pills I had been selling and started using the ORS solution in our village health hut". As part of the flip chart presentation, the facilitator shows how to prepare ORS and invites participants to practise, stressing the need to wash hands and utensils before preparation.

In the next session, participants play the oral rehydration card game, a set of fifty drawings showing positive and negative hygiene habits, and the elements for making ORS. Learners start with seven cards and try to get four good hygiene cards and the three ORS cards to win. In the process, they throw away the "bad" cards, explaining how bad habits can lead to diarrhoea and dehydration. Next, participants get a small book summarizing what they have learned. They are familiar with the information, so it is easier to read. In a further lesson, learners plan how to put their new knowledge into practice. In some villages, women organized a health group to advise mothers whose children had diarrhoea, making certain the essential ingredients and utensils were always at hand. At the final session on ORS, participants learn how to present the flip chart, practising in small groups. As a result it is common to see women presenting the chart to members of their family, to neighbourhood organizations or even in nearby villages.

In an evaluation covering nineteen villages, 83 per cent of the participants interviewed did not know how to prepare the ORS before the programme. At the end of it, all the women say they had used the solution each time their children had diarrhoea. Similarly, only one-third of the participants said they had vaccinated their children before the education programme. After module 3, most claimed that children and pregnant women in the village were systematically vaccinated at the right time. Agents at local health posts confirmed that the women now arrive knowing which immunizations are necessary, the names and dates of the vaccinations and which illnesses they prevent.



Financial and material management.
Module 4 teaches basic financial and material management for all types of village projects. Helping villagers to effectively manage their projects is one of the most important features of the TOSTAN programme. In module 4, participants learn about management and good bookkeeping. They study the information needed on a daily, monthly and yearly basis to assure that the money and materials invested in the project are well utilized. The many concrete examples presented throughout the module allow participants to practise using their new skills. The module is introduced when learners have already assimilated the maths and literacy notions needed to do bookkeeping. Multiplication skills are also introduced.

Management of human resources.
By exploring notions of leadership and group dynamics, module 5 "prepares the ground for democracy", says Falilou Cissé, a TOSTAN trainer. Through lively case studies related to their own experiences, learners discuss traditional forms of leadership — for instance, the custom of the eldest man in the village being chief — and ways to bring about change. They learn how to set pri-

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Discussing notions of leadership and group dynamics has emboldened women and increased their self-confidence.

orities and delegate. This has emboldened women, giving them confidence to speak out in front of men. Whether it be the village chief, the president of a village group or the leader of an association, participants interviewed after this module said they use its contents on a daily basis and felt they now had a better understanding of themselves and others. In many villages women are in charge of treasuries and committees have been set up to manage collective funds. In Kër Sembara, villagers are speaking about electing their village chief. In another village women are now included in the circle of elders when development activities are discussed with important visitors. As for literacy, learners produce various texts, including letters, newspaper articles, poetry and short stories. During a "writers' workshop" every two weeks, they share their work with other villagers. The process also strengthens grammar, spelling and punctuation. In math, participants learn to divide.

Feasibility study and income-generating projects.

Module 6 helps villagers make decisions about choosing income-generating projects. Using games, flip charts and plays, participants understand the need for a feasibility study before starting a project. In many villages, women participants have since started small profitable activities and can manage the projects themselves. In Medina Cherif, a village in the Kolda region, for example, the women's group started a doughnut-making project with FCFA 6,000 (US $12) after a feasibility study. In four months time they had savings of FCFA 40,000 (US $80).

In an evaluation in the Kolda region, where the TOSTAN programme was completed in 1992, about 90 per cent of participants reported they had used their management skills since finishing modules 4, 5 and 6. Participants with small businesses said they now keep financial records, and calculate profits and losses. They also appreciated learning management on a daily, monthly and yearly basis.

At the end of each module, learners take short, ungraded tests to see if the set aims for their work with the facilitator and trainer are "achieved", "in progress", or "not achieved".

Training: intensive practice

TOSTAN prefers the term "facilitator" to teacher, reflecting its two-way approach to learning: classes open the minds of participants to new ways of managing their lives, facilitators are guides on this path. Facilitators are expected to have at least four years of primary schooling, or be literate in national languages. They should come from the same village as their future students, and be prepared to stay there during the week for the programme's 18-month duration. The job profile calls for candidates to be "patient, tolerant, respectful of others, competent and devoted to learning". In practice, however, some facilitators have no education at all and often come from neighbouring villages if no one can be found in programme villages.

The low educational level of most facilitators convinced TOSTAN that one of the keys to a successful programme was very practical and comprehensive teaching materials. One of the reasons the Mauritanian experience of math teaching only partly succeeded was due to a lack of training and session guides for teachers. Most teachers were unfamiliar with the process and simply reverted to methods they had learned in French schools. The result of this in Senegal is a training programme "that is one of the most interesting and *avant-garde* in West Africa" according to a 1992 evaluation report.

Training starts off with a one-month session to understand TOSTAN's approaches and study the first module. Facilitators then have ten days of training before each new module. "In the whole programme, we emphasize processes," says Melching. "The facilitators have to study what the goals of education are and what TOSTAN's role is in all this. They learn that use of theatre, songs, games and poems is very close to traditional education."

Training lasts six to seven hours every day: "It is very intense," explains Deborah Fredo of the Center for International Education. "The facilitators are continual learners; they improve their own writing during the course. They have to get up and present a session, based on a lesson plan. They have to prepare each session and are criticized by other facilitators. You see them working every night. By the end of the training, they are ready to go."

During the course, facilitators have to assess students' progress by filling out a form every

About 55 percent of TOSTAN facilitators are women.

Photo: TOSTAN

month and evaluation tables at the end of each module. Less formally, TOSTAN asks facilitators to give their impressions of learners' progress and to encourage group discussions on the impact the programme has had on the lives of participants.

Facilitators are helped along by their trainer, who visits classes regularly. One trainer normally covers ten to thirteen villages close to one another. He or she helps village facilitators review the coming week's sessions and makes sure there are no major problems. The trainer also works closely with development agents and local authorities to coordinate class subjects and project activities. Trainers earn about FCFA 130,000 (US $260) per month (the minimum wage in Senegal is FCFA 40,000 or US $80). Facilitators get an honorarium of FCFA 25,000 (US $50) per month for teaching two classes with thirty participants each. This money is paid by the Village Education Committee elected in each community to be responsible for all activities of the programme.

The initial problem of finding qualified facilitators, particularly women, is slowly being overcome by recruiting TOSTAN graduates, such as Seexu Ndiaye, once an illiterate farmer, who followed TOSTAN's course and became a facilitator, then a trainer. The programme hopes to increase the number of female facilitators by recruiting from these graduates. Currently, about 55 per cent of facilitators are women.

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From experimentation to extension

From January 1989 to December 1992, the TOSTAN basic education programme operated in nineteen villages in the Kolda region of Senegal. The entire programme from module 1 through 6 was implemented despite an interruption due to lack of funds. The Kolda experiment was designed to allow a final revision of the six modules and serve as a teaching and logistical lab for TOSTAN trainers.

In 1991, the programme was extended to fifty-five villages and several non-governmental organizations. With government cooperation, UNICEF targeted villages which had water and a rural development programme. In practice, the choice was more arbitrary. In five villages, famine and drought forced the centres to close. "Politics won over in some cases," according to Alain Dunberry, a consultant for CIDA. "It is considered a great privilege for a village to have a literacy programme. Demand for them is greater than supply."

When basic education is made part of a development project, such as the UNICEF-inspired "Bamako Iniative" to improve basic health services in rural areas, TOSTAN starts off by approaching the people in charge of these programmes. "Those who run development activities in villages often have no formal education. We tell them about the importance of linking education to development to make their actions more successful," explains Amadou Alpha Bah. A committee in each village decides who will participate in the programme and where to hold classes.

More than 100 villages have requested the TOSTAN programme.

Separate classes for men and women are generally started, each with thirty students. Melching justifies this by women's initial lack of confidence: "In one class of fourteen women and two men", she recalls, "the men still did all the talking!". In most villages, however, men are quite supportive. They also see that change is beneficial to the whole family. At the end of two modules, "women have totally changed; they express their feelings without fear and are able to stand up in front of a group, organize and find strategies for action".

Collaboration with village authorities has a mixed track record. "Authorities often want to control the organization's actions rather than support them, but there are exceptions," says Amadou Alpha Bah, pointing to several prefects

Art forms such as theatre can be powerful ways to transmit educational messages.

who have shown genuine interest in community mobilization. "It makes a real difference when a local authority visits a classroom. It is very important to participants". In Taiba Njaay, an important religious leader volunteered to become a facilitator. He is a strong advocate of education in national languages and has been influential in underlining how education and better health contribute to better religious practice. In some areas, the record has been more ambivalent: in one, the prefect wanted to stop classes, claiming he had not been properly informed about them. Dunberry takes instances of poor cooperation one step further, underlining the importance of properly training government officials to manage and evaluate education programmes.

If the attitude of authorities towards the programme has varied, participants have not always been keen on contributing financially to the project. "The idea of villagers paying facilitators turned out to be unrealistic," writes Chantal Ouellet, a non-formal education specialist from the Canadian Centre for Research and International Cooperation, in her report. "Project organizers and trainers had to spend a lot of time sensitizing groups before villagers were prepared to pay facilitators. It eventually worked, but not without difficulty." Villagers are more ready to build classrooms and buy materials than pay a facilitator. "We feel it is only where communities have fairly substantial revenues and villagers are extremely motivated through awareness-raising work that the village development organization, and not individuals, can take responsibility for the facilitator."

One of the reasons UNICEF decided to continue funding the TOSTAN programme in the same regions for several years was precisely to tap into a fund of goodwill towards the course. UNICEF feels the programme has created a sensitivity in these areas, and that people are now convinced by non-formal education. Proof of its impact is that over 100 villages have asked for the programme and all have already contributed money to participate.

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Evaluations: a lasting impact

One of the innovative aspects of the TOSTAN education programme is the emphasis placed on internal evaluation. These evaluations have allowed TOSTAN to continually improve pedagogical materials and training based on first-hand information. Chantal Ouellet, consultant for the Canadian Center for Research and International Cooperation, set up the system and trained Ousmane Djimera, Senegalese education specialist, to continue after her departure.

The staying power of knowledge acquired in the TOSTAN programme is one of the highlights of several evaluations. The themes of each module were found relevant to local needs and many people changed their habits, especially in health and management.

An evaluation done at the end of the experimental phase (1989-1992) reported a dropout rate of 12 per cent, well below that usually encountered in many other literacy programmes. "The results confirm that important changes have occurred in the lives of participants after the TOSTAN-UNICEF programme: besides knowing how to read, write and do math in their mother tongue, many aspects of their lives, including health, hygiene, individual and group finances, the environment, project management, etc. have considerably improved. Participants have taken numerous initiatives which show they are on the way to becoming autonomous and self-sufficient," the report said.

A 1992 evaluation by CIDA echoed these findings and praised the major participation of women in the course. "TOSTAN's results prove that a well-structured approach, linking basic education concerns with literacy and giving enough importance to training can yield promising results. It also has to be sufficiently spread out in time. There is an obvious need for literacy and basic education, and the motivation is there. It is nevertheless necessary to provide sufficient resources to adequately meet these needs."

Results confirm that important changes have occurred in the lives of participants.

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Funding: a critical issue

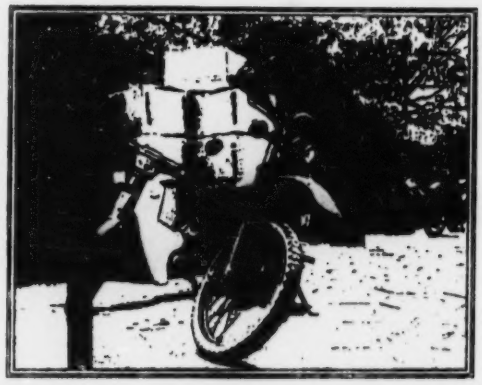
Trainers ride motorcycles when the villages under their jurisdiction are too far apart.

It is hard to estimate the cost of developing the TOSTAN Basic Education Programme, as it has been an ongoing process over the past fifteen years. Although no exhaustive evaluation exists to this day of TOSTAN's real costs, the following items are always taken into account when estimating the programme's cost at a given time and region:

* *equipment and materials for each village centre,*
* *cost of ninety days training for village facilitators over two years,*
* *seventeen books for village facilitators and eleven for village participants,*
* *one experienced trainer for ten villages,*
* *honorarium to village facilitators, either paid by the project or by the village organization,*
* *transport for the trainer. Costs can be substantially cut if the ten villages covered by a trainer are close enough so that he or she can walk or use a bicycle.*

The average eighteen-month to two-year project covering ten villages and 600 participants costs about US$40 per year and participant. Although this is much less than the cost of educating a child for one year in the formal system, some donor agencies argue that TOSTAN's programme is too expensive compared with other, shorter literacy courses that require less training and books.

To these arguments TOSTAN and UNICEF answer that a good educational programme



requires adequate initial investments. Once personnel is trained and books start being printed in larger quantities, costs gradually drop as the programme goes to scale. TOSTAN's accounts show that this is clearly starting to happen. The programme's initial costs not only included the materials in villages, but also training people to understand and work with participatory methods.

While UNICEF admits that the experimental phase from 1989-1991 went over budget due to its length, the cost of the programme has now fallen as materials for learners and facilitators have been tested and finalized. Administrative costs have also been cut. Suppliers and printers have been chosen on bids through a systematic and rational approach at all levels.

For the moment, TOSTAN's survival is tied to UNICEF's support. "We are under UNICEF's banner and only intervene where they want us to, but we have a very large demand from the non-formal sector, including associations in villages and big city suburbs, producer groups and craftsmen," says Amadouh Alpha Bah. In practice though, TOSTAN now recognizes the need to seek alternative sources of financing.

Lessons: going beyond literacy

TOSTAN's headquarters and staff at Thiès.

TOSTAN learners might be able to master basic reading and writing skills after five months, but part of their achievement is rooted in a method that took about fifteen years to develop and required considerable patience, curiosity, openness and dedication. It has turned into a solid programme that gives people firm foundations to improve their lives.

The programme was born out of a fruitful encounter between one individual, dedicated African educators, a country and the belief that culture could be a rich educational ally. "The method puts traditional civilization before a scientific mirror", says Alphonse Tay of UNESCO. The light cast by science on traditions leads to a critical examination of reality. Some traditions, such as leadership concepts, are modernized; others, including attitudes toward health and medicine, are demystified, while art forms, from dance to music and theatre, are powerful ways to transmit educational messages.

TOSTAN's programme is founded on the assumption that learning sinks in when people truly understand the how and why of things. Too often, development projects have given women technical tools without enough attention to the need for management skills. "Women have been the ones who have suffered. Often they aren't prepared to manage a millet machine so they feel like failures and are blamed," says Melching. "When you are not prepared, you are going to fail." In many TOSTAN villages, women have succeeded in pooling savings and running successful income-generating projects.

Several keys to TOSTAN's success emerge from studies and from conversations with individuals:

* The participation of learners in devising the programme's contents: all materials were designed through testing, dialogue and feedback. Although this required higher investment in the early stages than is the case for most literacy programmes, it has yielded impressive results and is comprehensive enough to be used in different environments. Proof is the success reported by more than twenty non-governmental organizations in tying TOSTAN's basic education programme to their own rural development projects.

*A comprehensive basic education programme strikes a deeper chord in people's lives than a straightforward literacy project. The objectives are clearly presented to learners before each module, providing a sense of direction. Understanding how each module will contribute to changing their lives and environment is a powerful motivating factor for learners. Throughout the TOSTAN course, participants learn to read, write and do math at the same time as they are introduced to the problem-solving process and to ways to improve health, hygiene and living standards in their community.

"You can't imagine how enthused people were with the materials in national languages."

Deborah Fredo

Combining the goals of conventional literacy programmes with those of consciousness-raising and transformation is one of TOSTAN's most innovative aspects.

* Striking the right balance between structure and flexibility means the programme can be used in different contexts. The problem-solving process, which is the basis of the TOSTAN programme, is presented in detail and can be adapted to villages according to their needs.

* The availability of materials is another attractive selling point: "There are new books for every module", says Amadou Alpha Bah. "It is a very powerful motive for participants. In many other literacy methods there is too much routine and people get bored."

* Learning in national languages makes literacy more accessible and effective. Evaluations cite the pride felt by learners about reading and writing in their mother tongue. Because values attached to local cultures are integrated into the modules, learners encounter words that have an emotional impact on them. TOSTAN graduates interviewed for one evaluation wanted their children to enrol in a national language programme.

* Training materials for facilitators: people with minimal education can become good teachers if they have the chance to improve their skills regularly and feel they are getting guidance. TOSTAN's training between each module, along with its detailed session guides for facilitators, are keys to the programme's success. Some non-governmental organizations have bought more than 500 copies of each book to use in their programmes. In the Gambia, the TOSTAN math sessions were adapted by the Curriculum Development Department for primary school use.

* The participatory approach spreads the educational message beyond the class. The module system encourages the class and the community at large to tackle problems. A common vocabulary builds up in the village about development. Proof lies in the frequency with which learners go to neighbouring villages to present the oral rehydration flip chart, for example. Today, after following the programme, adolescents can discuss some of its aspects with their parents, putting the family on the same level of awareness.

* Donors are more prepared to fund projects that result from a careful feasibility study and are run by people who have mastered literacy skills through a basic education programme attuned to local conditions. Many proposals by villagers have been financed by self-help funds and non-governmental organizations. The latter have been encouraged by the involvement of the population in identifying their problems, and successfully conceiving and seeing through a project to improve their lives.

* Local support and the motivation of facilitators and trainers are key factors in the programme's quality and success. When the programme receives backing from the village chief and the presidents of village groups, it is all the more effective. Lack of coordination and the choice of certain villages for political reasons lessened the programme's impact in some areas. In addition, the ability of the facilitator and trainer to be responsive to problems at the local level also has a positive impact on the participants.

* Determining class hours according to learners' work schedules is another key to the programme's success. One evaluation showed that heavy workloads at certain periods of the year, rather than a lack of interest in the programme, were the main reason for which participants, especially women, missed classes.

*A common vision: visitors and evaluators of the project are unanimous about the dedication, expertise and openness of TOSTAN's staff.

The adolescent programme: a two-track approach to illiteracy

"I can already read and write my own name and the name of my village and country. Soon I will be able to read stories and write my own."

In 1993, the Directing Pilot Committee for the Basic Education Programme (with representatives from the Ministry of Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages; the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Women, the Family and Children; the Ministry of Social Action; UNICEF; TOSTAN; other NGOs; and UNESCO) expressed their interest to use the TOSTAN approach and methodologies to reach out-of-school children.

The adolescents learn to read, write, do math, solve problems, and in general, develop their problem-solving skills and creativity. They also participate in sessions on health and hygiene, nutrition, family management, children's rights, history, geography, education for peace, leadership skills and group dynamics. Although the adult programme was closely followed, new information on different health issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, malaria and first aid were added, as well as new sessions on civic education and pre-professional skills.

Through stories, drama and games, the programme has also raised the issue of the girl child and the specific problems she encounters in Senegal. Many of the sessions have action objectives so that the children can put into practice what they are learning and discussing in the classroom. One day of every week is devoted to physical education (sports, traditional games, dance).

One of the major lessons learned from the adult programme was that the participants need much practice in writing real texts. Thus, with the help of the facilitator, children create and produce their own text once a week. TOSTAN chose topics for the texts that are related to children's rights because the adolescents always have a great deal to say about these issues that are directly connected to their everyday experiences. The text they

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write is then used to teach and analyze both the structure and content of the language. An example of a text written in Wolof by one group of girls from the village of Kër Moor Njaay, related to the right to equality among sexes, reads:

I am the only girl child in my family. I wash all the clothes in the house. I look for wood each day and do the cooking for the compound. I fetch water from the well and do the cleaning. I sweep the house and the courtyard.

Why do I do all this work? Because I am the girl child. I work from morning to night and when I lie down at night, I often cannot sleep because I'm so exhausted. And so I think and think and think. I feel so sad and sometimes cry, because I do not know when all this suffering will end.

The children are also presented with texts from their reading book which are written by an outside author. These answer such questions as: What is the biggest animal in the world? Why is there salt in the ocean? What are stars? Why do lions roar? How does a spider trap other insects? What is the biggest desert and longest river in the world? etc. These texts are short, amusing and well written so that the children enjoy sharing them with their parents, friends, brothers and sisters.

Using similar vocabulary and methodologies for the adult and adolescent programme has allowed the parents to actively participate in the education of their children for the first time. According to one villager, a child who goes through the educational system in the French language is often unable to readapt to the village household. The child feels he is "better" than other members of the family and certainly "different". This head of family explained that in his house, everyone now studies together and even uses the problem-solving process during family meetings. Indeed, feedback from villagers shows that communication between the generations has been greatly facilitated.

Most of the children have already built adapted wood stoves as part of the first module to help put in practice their problem-solving abilities (lack of firewood). The older children were trained by a TOSTAN facilitator who went from village to village and these children are now training others to continue building the stoves. Some have even begun small projects with their new skills.

There are few absences in the adolescent programme and high motivation among the participants. Some of the comments the children have made since the beginning of the programme reflect their excitement and enthusiasm as well as a real hope for the future possibilities of such a programme:

"I was surprised that our teacher never hits us! She listens to our ideas and we are not afraid to say what we think."

"I can already read and write my own name and the name of my village and country. Soon I will be able to read stories and write my own. I want to be a journalist in national languages."

"I didn't have a way of protecting my books for Module 1, so I used the problem-solving process and, with local materials, made myself a school bag."

"In many surrounding villages, our friends have not been as lucky as we to have this programme. When I finish, I want to teach children in other villages."

"I have learned so many things and can share them at night with my mother and father. They correct my math and reading and are very proud to be able to help me be a good student. I now feel I will be able to make my community a better place to live!"

The future

The future of Senegal, a country without mineral resources and whose capital city will create fewer and fewer productive jobs, continues to be in rural development, especially agriculture. If the city continues to remain more attractive than the countryside, it is utopian to believe farmers will stop migrating there. We must restore confidence to the rural world. This requires a new distribution of power, with more decisions made by farmers who would be free to chose their own forms of organization." Written in 1981 by the French agronomist René Dumont, these words have lost none of their relevance. Part of TOSTAN's strength is the confidence it has given the rural world, by valuing its culture and language, and by giving men and women the tools with which to shape their lives. People will stay in their communities when they have enough income, can take initiatives and see how knowledge – such as better health practices – can lead to change. Evidence of change is obvious in a majority of villages where TOSTAN has worked: health committees have been set up, adapted wood stoves are used, small wood lots have been planted, women manage the millet machines and children comment proudly that their mothers know how to read and write.

The availability of a comprehensive programme that offers participants problem-solving tools and deals with the crucial problems of health, hygiene and the environment is an asset for many regions of Africa faced with high illiteracy rates, especially among women. More focus needs to be put on implementing these well-studied and tested programmes rather than developing new ones. At the same time, more efforts must be made to increase the number of government agents trained in national languages in the literacy field. TOSTAN's close relationship to the Ministry of Education ensures a rich exchange of experiences and pedagogical techniques in the next few years, in both the formal and the non-formal sectors. Responding to the demand for basic education programmes in national languages, TOSTAN hopes to adapt its course into other languages by 1997 and eventually set up a training centre for the West Africa Region.

By giving adults and adolescents an exciting learning alternative, TOSTAN is attacking rural poverty. "Poverty is a vice that can reach the imagination and become addictive, taking away the individual's capacity to even imagine solutions," says Alphonse Tay of UNESCO. TOSTAN has shown that individuals without any formal education, from villages with minimal resources, can improve their lives and environment through a solid programme leading to greater autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Programmes that give villagers the tools to improve their living standards can help to stem migration towards cities.

FEATURES

SENEGAL

FACTS AND FIGURES

Population:	7.9 million
Average annual population growth rate (1980-93):	2.8%
Rural population (as % of total):	62
Land area (sq km):	196,722
GNP per capita (US$, 1990):	710
Illiteracy rate (1990):	61.7%
Female illiteracy rate:	74.9%
Male illiteracy:	48.1%
Duration of compulsory education:	6 years
Net enrolment ratio for first level education:	48%
Percentage reaching final first level grade:	78%
Population with access to health services:	40%
Children dying before age 5 (thousands):	61

Principal ethnic groups: Wolof, Fulani, Serer, Toucouleur, Diola.

Source: UNESCO World Education Report 1993, Europa 1993.

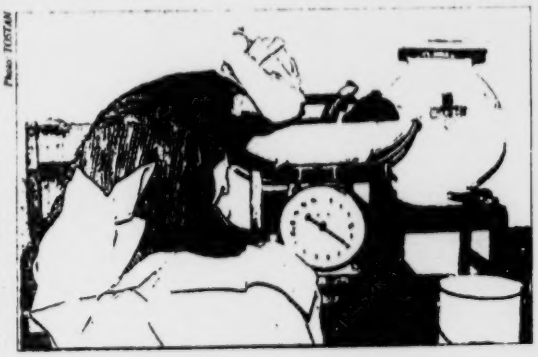

Photo: TOSTAN

A TOSTAN GRADUATE

Four years ago, Mareem Njaay did not know how to read or write. But having completed the TOSTAN basic education programme, she now runs a baby-weighing project, organized in response to rising malnutrition in Saam Njaay and 18 surrounding villages. With several other women, she followed training at a nearby nutritional centre run by the Swiss organization, Terre des Hommes. She learnt ways to prevent malnutrition and started her project with a stock of medicine to treat conjunctivitis, malaria and worms. Today, against 100 FCFA (US 50.2), mothers can participate in a day-long seminar on ways to improve children's nutrition, such as by enriching local foods with oil and sugar. The name, weight and village of every child is systematically recorded every time he/she is brought to the project, allowing Mareem Njaay and her colleagues to monitor changes.

Making it work

Inspiring experiences

FLIPCHART ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: A COMMUNITY LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN SENEGAL

by Rosa-María Torres (1)

Four o'clock. The expected day and time has arrived: by foot or by bus, chanting and singing, children and adults from a nearby village begin to stream into this other village. Learners –children and adolescents– from the other village want to share what they have learnt in school around children's rights, through a special act they have prepared with the help of their facilitator. Children and adults are present, many of them students of either the adult or the adolescent programme, parents, the facilitators, and the members of the Village Management Committees of both villages. This is part of the non-formal basic education programme in national languages initiated in 1988 and implemented in Thiès by TOSTAN, a Senegalese NGO, with UNICEF and CIDA support.

The village comprises of barely a dozen homes. The houses are small and built with mud and straw, clustered together and separated from another cluster by wooden fences made out of branches. A few scattered trees and dusty narrow streets complete the scenario.

Most adults present are women. Many of them are mothers of the students, many of them are students or ex-students themselves of the adult education programme. Today, Friday, I am told, many men are at the mosque.

The entertainment has been organized in the open air, at the entrance of the village, next to a big baobab tree. A huge canvas hung between the tree and a fence provides a tent to protect against the sun. Children and adults sit on the floor, on mats or on small wooden seats. According to my count, over 200 people are gathered here. Facing them is a big map, a blackboard, a flipchart and a table.

Several signs with written texts in Wolof are to be seen all over the village: on the tree, on the wooden fences, on the houses themselves. They are part of an effort to create a "literate environment", surrounding both adults and children with written texts. Streets have been baptized with such names as STREET OF KNOWLEDGE and STREET OF PEACE. The *boutique* (a small village shop where mainly matches, oil, salt, are sold) –which, together with the school is the only "modern" cement house in the village– displays on its facade a sign in Wolof that reads: BOUTIQUE - CHOOSE WHAT YOU WANT.

The facilitator is the master of ceremonies. He has made the drawings to illustrate children's rights, prepared his students, and promoted and organized this encounter. Everything is conducted in Wolof, one of Senegal's six national languages.

A series of songs introduce the act. The **alphabet song** seems to be one of the most popular ones: they tell me that the words remain the same, but each village puts it to its own melody, some of them with chorals. Most of the songs have been written by the students with the help of their facilitator. Thus, through music and rhythm, they welcome the visitors, praise the facilitator and acknowledge the organizations in charge of the education programme. A special song has been created on children's rights.

The facilitator announces the official start of the programme and explains it at length to the audience. Then he begins to unfold the flipchart.

CHILDREN OF THE WORLD

The first picture is an introduction to the flipchart and presents children of different races from different countries, wearing different costumes. The facilitator asks the students to describe what they see in the picture, and then asks them to point out differences in the children. Children of all ages insistently raise their hands and snap their fingers. They all want to speak. They give all sorts of answers: the hair, the shoes, the skin color, the height, the clothes, the eyes. He then asks what their similarities are and the children again answer: they are all people, they all have joys and problems, they all have to eat food. One small girl shyly states: *"All the children have rights"*. Everyone claps. Now the facilitator asks for a volunteer to come to the front, identify and choose a sheet of paper on which a text is written corresponding to the subject of the drawing, in this case, "All the children of the world have rights". A girl comes to the front to perform this part of the presentation: she studies the different sheets displayed on the table, picks the right

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sheet, and then "reads" it aloud while turning around several times so that the phrase is visible to the entire audience. While "read" is here a verb between inverted commas –these young learners have started school only two months ago– since it is rather visually recognizing words and phrases, this is actually the very first step to real reading, to reading with meaning and with fun!

Adults are expectant, they laugh and applaud, seem both proud and annoyed. Perplexed and uneasy at the beginning, they begin to feel increasingly at ease and more comfortable as the act unfolds.

The whole presentation on children's rights will follow this pattern: introduction of the picture; questions to children on what they see illustrated; discussion of the specific right suggested by the picture; interpretation of the right by the children through a short, often provocative, dramatization or poem they have created; discussion of the play or poem; and identification and reading aloud of small texts written on sheets of paper and which correspond to the drawings.

THE RIGHT TO GOOD NUTRITION

The picture shows various foods: millet, chicken, tomatoes, fish, papaya, monkey bread (a fruit from the baobab tree) and eggs. After an introductory discussion on the right to good nutrition, a child reads a poem about a selfish father who wants all the good morsels of food saved for himself, and is not concerned about his children's nutrition. A man in the audience, who has been listening to the story with evident anxiety, raises his hand and says genuinely annoyed: *"But I hide when do I it. How do you know?"*. Everyone laughs. The facilitator then asks the children how they would answer the selfish father. Further discussion follows among the men. Volunteers come to the front and pick up sheets with colorful drawings of food and short phrases written in Wolof: CHILDREN AND CHICKEN - CHILDREN AND PAPAYA - CHILDREN AND MILLET - CHILDREN AND GOOD NUTRITION.

THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

The illustration shows a mother immunizing her young child. Following the questions and answers on children's right to health, a skit is staged with a husband and wife discussing the immunization issue. The wife –a young volunteer who has borrowed a baby from a real mother in the audience– asks her husband for money in order to vaccinate the child. He refuses and argues that he does not have the money. She blames him for spending the money in playing the lottery and buying himself tea. Finally, he agrees and she takes the baby to the vaccination post. Laughter and applause follow from the audience as the boy (playing the husband) dances off into the crowd. A lively discussion among the parents ensues in reaction to the husband's attitude. A girl volunteers to identify, pick up and read aloud the message "Children and health".

THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

The picture shows a woman with a broom, cleaning up her yard, and several garbage baskets aligned by the fence of the house. After discussion, the children present a skit in which they have been working on a village clean-up and are discussing further actions to assure success. Then an older man comes along and throws down paper from the food he has been eating. When the children try to explain to him that he should not dirty the environment they are working to clean up, he becomes angry and says that children do not have the right to tell adults what to do. Discussion follows this skit among the children and the adults. The facilitator asks: *"What will happen in the future if everyone continues to pollute the environment?"*. The children respond in unison: *"Our whole country will be a garbage pile!"*. The adults are delighted with this outburst.

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The drawings illustrate four types of learning ("houses of learning"): a woman teaching her child to cook (life learning), a blacksmith teaching a young apprentice (traditional job learning), a boy with a wooden slate on his knees (religious learning), and a boy and a girl with modern clothing and books under their arms (learning brought in from the outside, the French

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school system). The facilitator asks questions on each type of learning: what for? what methods? what differences? A child then comes forward and reads a poem on the importance of learning in national languages.

THE RIGHT NOT TO WORK TOO MUCH

In this drawing, a girl is busy with many domestic chores. An eight year old girl comes to the front and reads a poem that speaks of a girl who does all the work in the house and has no time to play. She ends the poem with: *"At night, when I finally lie down to sleep, I think and think and think about life. My heart is full and I begin to cry because I do not know when all this suffering will end"*. Adults –and, particularly, mothers– seem uncomfortable and distressed.

[A PARENTHESIS ON CHILDREN'S RESPONSIBILITIES]

At this point, a sheet on RESPONSIBILITIES is inserted in the flipchart, apparently to counterbalance the many rights of children and the increasing anxiety of parents. There are no pictures on this paper, only written text. The facilitator asks the children to name their responsibilities and duties. Some of the answers are: *to be polite; to be respectful; to love oneself; love one's country; to be obedient; to help out; to promote peace.*

THE RIGHT TO PLAY

The illustration shows several children at play; a boy and a girl playing together; a girl on a swing; another girl dancing.

The facilitator asks volunteers to show the audience certain traditional Senegalese games. Five girls come to the front and show two such games, combining song and rhythm.

THE RIGHT TO FREE EXPRESSION

The drawing shows children talking to each other in a circle. A boy recites a poem that ends with *"all children have good ideas, so let us speak up"*. Adults laugh nervously.

THE RIGHT NOT TO BE EXPLOITED

The illustration shows a *Marabout*[2] with a child chained next to him, and another child begging near a bus full of people. The issue appears to be very sensitive. A man, visibly upset, asks for an explanation. The facilitator explains that there are different types of *Marabouts*, and that this one belongs to the type that do not really educate children under their care, but instead exploit them and live off them, forcing children to beg and to bring them money, or else they get punished and chained. Then, he tells his own story while he lived in a *daara* with a *Marabout*: he begged for alms, but only in his own neighborhood and at that time begging was considered a formative experience, learning to be humble and to see how hard it is to be poor. Everyone is really attentive to his explanation. I see many mothers nod their heads in agreement.

THE RIGHT NOT TO BE PUNISHED

The drawing shows a father beating his son. Children comment that no one has the right to beat anyone (literally, in Wolof, "no one has the right to take the personality away from another person"). Parents remain quiet. One of the visitors intervenes and challenges the children with the question: *"But how do you teach children if you do not punish them?"*. A small, skinny girl immediately responds: *"You take him or her to the back of the house or into a room, and there you talk to them and advise them."* There is a sustained laughter. Many –including the Senegalese visitor– seem surprised at the young girl's quick, sharp and wise response.

In concluding the act we, the visitors, are introduced. The Presidents of both Village Management Committees address the audience. They congratulate and applaud the facilitator. A girl spontaneously reminds everyone to also congratulate and applaud the facilitator's trainer.

In his brief address, one of the Presidents of the Committee says to the children: *"If I were you, and had learnt what you have learnt in two months, I would be shouting and praising your teacher more than you do"*. A father in the audience thanks children because *"they have brought a lot of knowledge to the adults"*. A mother says that *"it is the first time that two neighboring communities have met together. And this is thanks to the education of both the children and the adults"*. A young boy, full of enthusiasm, jumps into the centre of the stage and starts to dance. Someone grabs a huge plastic bowl and uses it as a drum.

And the big party begins. Girls and boys, children and adults: all are in the mood to dance. The same spot, different choreography. Brief, intense, frantic, individual dancing performances that commit the whole body, the mind, the entire person. While one dances, the others clap hands, and others –mainly women– play on improvised drums (plastic, metal, wood) that multiply very quickly. An educational act turns into a village celebration. The critical issue of children's rights has brought children and adults closer, and two villages in contact for the first time.

We have witnessed a memorable occasion in the lives of these children and adults, and of these villages. Nothing

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here has been conventional. Education and rights, school and life, students and parents, parents and teachers, teachers and students, reading-writing and singing-dancing, flipchart, poems and plays: they all seemingly interact and go together naturally, as if in a continuum. And this is why conventional categories and classifications -such as **formal/non-formal/informal education**, or **school/out-of-school**, or the distinction between **children/adolescents/adults**, or between **children's education** and **adult education**, or even the term **community participation** –do not help to capture and explain what this is all about.

There is, definitely, an innovative approach to literacy; not necessarily a new method but a renewed understanding and a fresh insight on the meaning and joy involved in teaching and learning to read and write. Literacy as something that involves both children and adults, as a creative undertaking on the part of both teachers and learners, as an intelligent act, as a communication challenge. Literacy not per se but to know about one's rights, to reflect upon and to discuss them. Literacy as a social and cultural capital to share with others, with other children, with other adults, with other villages. Children and adults learning together, becoming literate and aware together, in a genuine family and community learning process.

No conventional terms or prefabricated educational jargon can describe what the villagers and ourselves, the visitors, experienced in those two hours in Thiès. This is why I have preferred to describe it, and to describe it as I saw it, to share it with you.

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(2) Traditional teacher in the *daara* (religious Koranic school).

Poetry and Social Change

While every module makes learners look critically at their surroundings, TOSTAN has been successful in using social mobilization to reinforce the education classes. UNICEF and OXFAM-America have sponsored poetry-debate sessions in national languages in TOSTAN classes. Working with traditional musicians and singers, a Senegalese poet, Thierno Seydou Sall visited education classes to recite poetry in Wolof, then lead discussions on issues that are often taboo.

Through these sessions, "people have started to think about their feelings and their rights", says Melching. As one woman who attended the poetry session said, "we all had these ideas before but we didn't dare say anything. Now we have the courage to stand up and say what we really think." TOSTAN frequently receives poems from women written after the workshop and they reflect a new-found confidence.

This poem was written by Soxna Ngiraan, a 34-year-old participant from Kër Sayib. It has been translated from Wolof.

The First Wife of a Not-So-Good Man

I am the first wife of a not so-good-man
And I am frustrated.
I married before others married
Struggled before others struggled
Tired before others tired
In order for my family to succeed.

I have known hunger
I have known thirst
In order for my family to succeed.

Yet how did you thank me,
not-so-good man?
You waited until I was old
And had many children...
Then you married a young girl
And placed her high above me.
Whatever you have, you give to her
Whatever you hear, you tell to her.

I no longer see you.
I no longer talk to you.

If I quarrel with her, you say it's my fault
If we argue, you tell me to leave.

I no longer have a voice in this house
And my children are suffering too.
So will I ever experience the success
I so fervently sought?
I have little hope now
The Wolof say:
"Where there has been a fire
It is difficult for a plant to grow."

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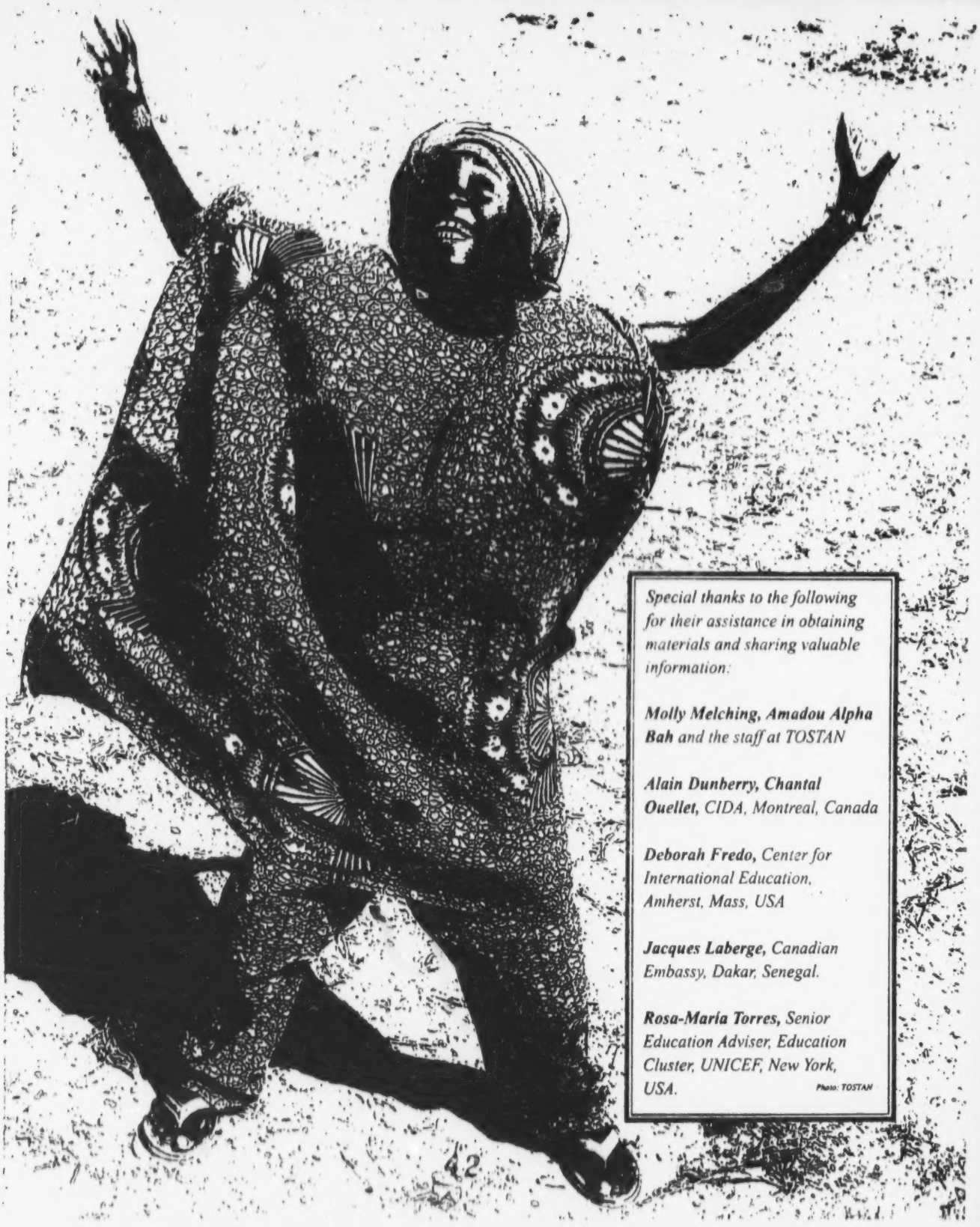

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"I am no longer afraid to speak out about my fears and hopes", says Duusu Konate, a Senegalese woman living in the small village of Kër Simbara. Like many thousands of villagers, she has participated in a basic education programme in national languages called TOSTAN.

In Wolof, spoken by a majority of Senegalese, TOSTAN means "breakthrough". This 18-month programme goes beyond literacy to give learners the means to define and solve problems, improve their families' health and start small-scale projects in response to local needs. Taking African culture as its starting point, the programme has been developed with villagers for over 10 years. Since 1988, the UNICEF-supported programme has reached 15,000 people in over 350 villages across Senegal. Recently, a separate adolescent programme has been launched. Proof of its success is that more than 20 non-governmental organizations have tied TOSTAN's basic education programme to their own rural development projects.

In drought-striken Senegal, women's literacy rate is 25 percent, men's is 52 percent. Realizing that the first preoccupation of villagers may not be to learn how to read and write, but to improve their livelihood, TOSTAN has developed a programme of six modules, throughout which literacy is linked to life skills, and the learning method is participatory. Efficient teacher training, thoroughly tested educational materials and a whole language approach to reading and writing make the TOSTAN method relevant for all those interested in developing literacy programmes in Africa and elsewhere.

The editors

Making it work

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